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HARSHLY

# THE RAIN FELL

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*Peter North*

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Peter North, the maker of these *Lines*, spent most of his life in the Canadian West. He was not making poetry then — that came after he returned from the last war. But it seems to me that his strongest work to date is drawn from his Western experiences which are now recollected and transmuted into several of the poems you will find here.

The other work you will find here shows that Peter North is getting new stimulus from Toronto and Ontario where he now lives. This is a growing and active talent.

And so, once more, the growing company of Canadian writers welcomes to it yet another man from the short grass country.

JAMES SCOTT



This booklet is published at the request of some of my friends. If "Harshly The Rain Fell" and its companion poem appear grim to gentle readers, please remember that nature is not always kind.

Thanks are extended to the Pen Guild of Toronto, The Canadian Home Journal, The Farmer's Magazine, and the Globe and Mail.

The Author

307 Dundas St. E.,  
Toronto, Ontario  
Canada.  
price 50 cts.

September 1960

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## HARSHLY THE RAIN FELL

Wearing old clothes neatly mended,  
three small children walked a country road to school.  
The season was at late spring.  
On the wide sweep of the prairie the air was clean and strong,  
and the healthy sheen of the early wheat was wonderful to see.

Swinging a hard pail which contained his lunch,  
Bobby, the youngest of the trio announced:  
"My Mum's going to buy me a suit next fall."  
Tommy's face shone above his threadbare jacket.  
"My Dad's getting me a sheepskin coat," he returned.  
Then it was Mary's turn.  
She spoke slowly, as one older than her years.  
"I'm going to have a new winter outfit . . . if there's a crop."  
At this the boys' bright faces clouded.  
They understood only too well.

The summer was dry.  
Sometimes the winds were cool,  
but no moisture fell, except at long intervals,  
when the indifferent Rain God would turn in his sleep and sigh —  
a fleeting shower which did not even lay the accumulated dust—.  
On dog days, the surrounding hills were shrouded with heat haze;  
in cooler periods they stood forth brown and grim.  
Drought marched across the wheat fields,  
silently stroking the shrinking heads.  
The staid earth brooded over her charge, nurturing as best she  
could.

Harvest time came.  
Blender platforms were lowered to full extent,  
and tilted cutter-bars left the stubble almost level with the ground.  
From the machines came meagre misshapen bundles.  
Then, before the pitiful garnering was finished,  
the God of Rain awakened, and down came the ill-timed moisture.

If only it had come when thread like roots were reaching,  
reaching into the subsoil for the last reserve of sustenance !  
Day after dismal day dragged by,  
until the grain in the sheaf-heads sprouted greenly  
in isolate stooks, forlorn in the wet fields.  
And beneath the blackened butts of the mouldering sheaves,  
lay Bobby's suit, Tommy's sheepskin coat, and Mary's winter  
outfit.

Awarded first prize in the annual contest of the Pen Guild 1948-49.

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## LITTLE DAVID

When I get big I'm going to be  
Commander of a ship and see  
The far off lands I've heard about,  
Where natives sing and dance and shout.

I'll stride my bridge and call the mate  
And bellow at him if he's late,  
Then if he dares to disagree,  
I'll toss the beggar in the sea !

My crew will be so scared of me  
They'll go on tip-toes past my lee;  
I'll have a cutlass at my side  
As o'er the briny waves I ride.

I'll dig for treasure in the sands  
Long hidden there by pirate hands;  
The natives' eyes will shine and gleam  
When I pass round mince pie with cream !

Then when my gold is all aboard,  
Stacked up in sacks and tied with cord,  
My crew will make the capstan hum —  
And I'll go sailing home to Mum !

## NOCTURNAL IMAGERY

Night lamps on a city street  
In deserted suburbs;  
Pavements cold and glistening,  
Midnight by the chime.

Light poles throw shadows,  
Grotesque elongated angles;  
Morpheus spreads a dark cloak  
Around resting houses.

The ascending frosty moon  
Outlines stark chimney-pots,  
And through the branches of trees  
Lattice work on asphalt.

A policeman strides heavily,  
Solitary, lonesome.  
A black cat pads with purpose  
Down an alley of void.

## ONE NIGHT OF STORM

Deep the forest and dark the shore,  
Storm clouds rift and breakers roar;  
Obliterate cliffs on ocean's rim  
Are furrowed, scarred, stoic and grim.

Tumult is rising; through the night  
A jagged flash; transient light  
Reveals the waves unceasing raid  
While thunder sounds dull cannonade.

The beacon from the lighthouse tower  
Is intermittent hour by hour;  
Seamen caught in the tempest, peer,  
And thank their God for a course to steer.

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Calm the morning; white seagulls fly  
From safe coverts and sail blue sky;  
Restored again from God to man —  
The breathless beauty of Grand Manan.



## HAIL

Suddenly the air was cold;  
dark clouds with lower parts gray white  
came swiftly over the north west horizon.  
Troubled farmers paced their floors,  
desperately hoping the storm would veer . . .  
Then, softly at first,  
a gentle patter,  
like a handful of dried peas thrown upon a roof:  
anguished wives  
stared feelingly at their husbands . . .  
louder grew the patter  
rising in  
crescendos of devilish intensity;  
torrents of hail hit the ground,  
rebounding high in the shattered air  
until fields lay mute and stricken,  
their crops battered to the soil  
from whence they came.

. . .

## CINQUAIN

Distraught,  
miserable,  
the snivelling wind  
came hounded by the dogs of night and  
meaned by.

## CHOPIN

His music  
wraps me in a cloak of ecstasy,  
and I,  
oblivious of man's sordidness and cruelty,  
rise and feel the sweep of Angel wings.  
So long as women bear travail  
with sweet maternal love,  
so long as stars keep vigil  
in their allotted spheres,  
and waves of ocean  
break on shore and cliff,  
so shall his spirit live  
and bring joy and inspiration  
to those of mankind  
who raise their eyes  
above the earth.



## TRUE FRIENDSHIP

True friendship does not hold a hand outstretched  
For what it may receive without a cost,  
Nor does it flatter with a hidden guile,  
And when desires are fed — the sudden frost.

True friends are those whose independent needs  
May freely draw upon each other's store;  
So drawing, each the richer is by far  
Than either dreamed in solitude before.

## NIGHT AND THE RAINBOW BRIDGE

Long lines of cars move slowly,  
their occupants gazing in wonder  
at the illuminated Falls.  
People lean against the parapet,  
their eyes intent on the glorious sight.  
Suddenly, into the subdued air  
pour notes of liquid music  
the bells in the high tower  
are playing to the night,  
"Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling"  
and all the while there comes  
the muted roar  
of distant waters  
falling        falling



## THE GALE

Wild horses send the skies tonight  
Chased by the howling wind,  
Hard ridden by the formless wraiths,  
The moon-dogs close behind.

## THERE IS NO DEATH

I take delight to contemplate  
The restoration of my soul,  
Completing cycles pre-ordained —  
A part of universal whole —

It comforts me and strengthens  
To view transition in the light  
Of cosmic laws of justice, made  
By one supreme eternal right.

Each time I come upon this earth  
I have the past inviolate  
And if in willfulness I err  
I know that I must compensate

With earth rebirth and sojourn here  
I creep closer towards my God.  
Then leave to rise to greater heights  
While clay meets clay beneath the sod.

## HARVEST NIGHT

As shadows lengthen at the daylight's close  
The dusty stooker bends his weary back  
And picking up the last sheaf for the day  
Moves off along the stable to his shack.

The stooks stand guard in lines across the field,  
Each one is placed and built with careful skill,  
Set firm and strong until some future time  
When one by one they'll feed the hungry mill.

The rising moon with mild appraising glance  
Is grieved to see the changes wrought below,  
For last night when she smiled upon the scene  
The wheat smiled back in rippling silver glow.

Now every stubbled stalk is loaded full  
With sustenance the head no longer needs,  
And diamonds shine between the serried rows  
As moisture tips each severance with beads.

Now gray mist rises from the lower ground  
And slowly spreading, shrouds the ghostly field;  
My Lady Moon descends the starry stair  
While darkened doors of night are closed and sealed.



## CINQUAIN

My wish;  
a twilight room,  
a table set for two,  
furnishings gleaming in light of  
candles.

## O GOD, HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN THIS SMALL SPOT ?

The burning sun has killed my father's crops;  
His hair shows whiter and he is resigned.  
The richness of my mother's voice has gone  
And now she speaks in sharpened worried tones.  
The teacher's face betrays bewilderment —  
She boards with us and walks the trail to school —  
An easterner, she does not understand  
How this could happen to her "Golden West."  
My younger brother still goes round barefoot  
Although the water trough is fringed with ice;  
Each morning when he brings the cows, his feet  
Are wet from walking through the frosty grass.

Three years ago we had a bumper crop;  
Machines and muscles tried their strength with it,  
And faces glowed beneath hot sweat and dirt.  
The next year windstorms gouged the frightened soil  
Which rose in clouds to seek retreat in bluffs,  
The summer after that we got the hail.  
The west wall of our barn still bears the scars  
Of battering received from slanting ice —  
Remembrance signs, as though we could forget —!

Today, wild geese were etched on brazen sky —  
A giant spearhead sped by mystery,  
Unerring instinct drawing them far south —  
They broke formation to survey this place,  
But very soon the spearhead formed again.  
Why should they land where there is nothing left,  
But empty hulls within short flattened heads  
On toughened stalks of papery brown straw?

And now the earth is tilting from the sun . . .  
Cold darkness closes in and is endured.  
The sombre night gives rise to sombre thoughts.  
How can I accept my parents' hurt?  
The passing years are wasted and this life  
Is driving them the faster to their graves.  
This drabness filters to my very soul.  
O God, have you forgotten this small spot?

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## APPENDIX

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North, P.  
Harshly the rain  
fell.

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North. Peter.

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